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STORY IDEA:

RAPIDLY BECOMING A SPORTS MECCA

A combination of exceptional sports facilities, ideal climate and close proximity to Orlando's world-famous attractions are resulting in Seminole County becoming a sports mecca for national and international athletes alike.

Offering 100 different sports venues, a key to Seminole's sports success is the Seminole County Sports Training Center at Lake Sylvan Park in Sanford. A state-of-the-art, 15,000-square-foot training facility opened in July 1993. It includes a weight training room, shower/locker rooms, a physical therapy and conditioning area, meeting and dining space, a catering kitchen and a 65" big-screen television with a satellite dish to allow athletes in training to view their performances on video or watch competitors' matches in progress.

Adjacent to the center are six 80-yard x 120-yard international regulation sports fields (for soccer, rugby, field hockey, American football, flag football and lacrosse) as well as nine tennis courts and four outdoor racquetball courts.

The permanent home of the United States Soccer Federation, the center was the home field for the gold medal winning U.S. Women's Soccer Team for 18 months in preparation for the 1996 Centennial Olympics in Atlanta. Also, a designated 1994 World Cup training site, the center was used by the Republic of Ireland World Cup team, and other soccer teams from around the world. In addition, the center has hosted the U.S. Field Hockey Association Festival.

Adding to Seminole County's appeal is the \$4-million Seminole County Softball complex. Located in Altamonte Springs, the complex has hosted the National Softball Association, the American Softball Association, and the Senior Softball World Series.

The complex includes five lighted Bermuda grass fields with covered dugouts and separate electronic scoreboards. Located in the center of the five fields is an 8,000-square-foot, three-story operations center which houses the concessions area, restrooms with showers, a meeting room and viewing balcony, an administrative office and scorekeeper areas. Parking and seating are plentiful.

The state-of-the-art Lake Brantley Aquatic Center in Altamonte Springs has served as the training facility for a host of Olympic-caliber athletes, among them the USA, Russian and Italian National Water Polo teams, the Spanish Olympic Swim team, and the Canadian Olympic Synchronized Swim Team.

Merrill Park, located in Altamonte Springs, is the Official USA Softball National Team training center for the east coast, and hosts various softball tournaments year-round. It features three lighted Bermuda grass fields.

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The Historic Sanford Memorial Stadium has been a showcase for famous baseball players including Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, Tim Lincecum and David Eckstein. Currently the home of the Florida Collegiate Summer League Sanford River Rats and the Sanford Babe Ruth League, the facility also hosts many high school and college games throughout the year. Amenities include locker rooms, meeting rooms, a concession stand, a press box and seating for 2,000+ fans.

Elsewhere, there are more than 10 public or semi-private golf courses, as well as 18 public parks scattered throughout Seminole County for those “casual” athletes whose lifestyle is sports and exercise-oriented, with activities ranging from tennis to racquetball to volleyball to basketball to exercise trails.

Additional sporting events calling Seminole County home are the World Wakeboarding Championships, the American Powerboat Racing Superleague American Finals and the Professional Water Ski Tour.

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